



# August 9

## A DAY FOR CELEBRATING

**On August 9 thousands of women all over South Africa will be celebrating National Women's Day**

In 1956 on the morning of August 9, 20 000 women gathered in Pretoria at the office of the Prime Minister, JG Strydom. They were protesting against the pass laws being extended to women.

Women from all over South Africa arrived in Pretoria with babies on their backs, with food baskets and most importantly, each woman carried a letter of protest addressed to Strydom. When the women arrived to hand over the letters of protest, Strydom was not there.

"The Prime Minister has run away he is scared of us women!" said the late Lilian Ngoyi, one of the leaders of the march. The crowd stood in total silence with their fists raised in the air for 30 full minutes. The silence was broken by "Nkosi Sikelel'i Afrika". The 7 year campaign that women waged against carrying passes was defeated by the state in 1959 when all Africans were forced to carry the "dompas".

August 9 will go down in our history books as the day South African women shook the country.

### **Covenant with women of the world**

I came this way  
moved by the spirit  
Here I found a place  
to rest my weary heart,  
to relieve my shoulders  
of the yoke of oppression,  
Maybe to pass it on to you, I do not know

I got inspiration  
I had time off  
from seeing blood in my country  
from hearing cries of women and children  
from risking every minute of my life  
in the apartheid South Africa

I responded  
when you said: "Let us be in covenant  
as our God is with us".  
Now I know our struggle is also your struggle  
Across the miles you feel  
the piercing pain that stabs our hearts merci-  
lessly.

For once, I knew the Lord had spoken  
Here in your country I see rivers flowing  
the land so green with nature's beauty.  
My tears wanted to flow  
but, I would not allow it.

Women of the world  
Let us weave a blanket of peace  
Let us sew together a quilt with all colours in  
harmony  
Let us create melodies as we sing in one  
voice  
Let us untie the knots of aprons of injustice  
Let us together roll the stone away  
to make way for a new life

Together we are strong  
Together we can change the world

*By Boitumelo Mofokeng who dedicates this poem to all the women in the world*

